

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
December 2, 2010

CARPINTERIA RINCON COASTAL TRAIL

File No. 10-032-01
Project Manager: Rachel Couch

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$50,000 to the City of Carpinteria to prepare environmental compliance documents for a segment of the California Coastal Trail that will provide public access to and along the Santa Barbara Channel shoreline.

LOCATION: South of Highway 101, between East Carpinteria Avenue and Rincon County Park, Carpinteria, Santa Barbara County (Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map).

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Site Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Figures and Photos of Carpinteria Coastal Vista Trail](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31400-31410 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of up to \$50,000 (fifty thousand dollars) to the City of Carpinteria (the City) to prepare environmental compliance documents for a segment of the California Coastal Trail in Santa Barbara County, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the commencement of work and the disbursement of funds, the City shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a detailed work program, schedule and budget, and the names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the project.
2. To the extent appropriate, the City shall ensure that the final designs of project improvements are consistent with the Conservancy’s ‘Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development’ and all applicable federal and state statutes, regulations and guidelines for disabled access.
3. The City shall post California Coastal Trail signs along existing segments of the Coastal Trail within its jurisdiction.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated by the Conservancy on June 4, 2009.
2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding public access.
3. The project will serve greater than local needs.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize disbursement of up to \$50,000 to the City of Carpinteria (the City) to prepare environmental documents for the construction of a one-mile segment (“the Rincon segment”) of the Carpinteria Coastal Vista Trail (CCVT) in eastern Santa Barbara County. As part of the 1,200-mile California Coastal Trail (CCT), the Rincon segment will provide a hiking and biking connection between Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties and will improve safety and access to the Santa Barbara Channel shoreline.

The Rincon segment will help close a gap in the CCT at a critical location. The area has high visitor activity, offering spectacular scenery and one of the best opportunities along the entire stretch of Santa Barbara coastline to view beaches, the Channel Islands, marine life, and the Los Padres National Forest. The segment will link Carpinteria Bluffs Nature Preserve and Rincon County Park, both popular coastal destinations, and will also extend the Pacific Coast Bikeway, thereby improving recreational opportunities along the South Coast. The existing Carpinteria Bluffs trail connects to a seal rookery viewing area well known among naturalists. Eventually, upon completion of other segments, the trail will connect to Carpinteria State Beach and the Carpinteria Salt Marsh Preserve, west of the City. The Pacific Coast Bikeway extends east to Seaside and eventually to Emma Wood State Park. From the State Park, cyclists and pedestrians can join the CCT to the Ventura County Fairgrounds and the City of Ventura Waterfront.

The Rincon segment of the CCVT is a high priority for implementation because the existing gap in the trail creates a significant constraint for bicyclists and pedestrians. Access between the City and Rincon County Park has traditionally been by freeway even though these locations are less than two miles apart. Currently, the only alternatives for non-motorized travel along this section of the coast are to use the unsafe shoulders of Highway 101, take a longer inland route, or illegally use the unsanctioned trail present along the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) right-of-way.

The Rincon segment will provide an extension to the Carpinteria Bluffs trail system for approximately one mile from eastern Carpinteria Avenue to Rincon County Park at the Ventura County line (Exhibit 4: Photographs). The trail will start at what is currently the eastern terminus of the Bluffs trail and will continue east toward Rincon Point. The trail will then descend and cross over the Union Pacific Railroad tracks on a pedestrian/bicycle bridge to be installed as part of the segment. The new bridge will discourage use of the railroad right of way by pedestrians and provide safer access to the beach. The trail will then meander through coastal sage scrub before reaching the County Park parking lot, picnic area, natural beach, and surf break.

The trail will be constructed on City and County-owned land except for small portions within UPRR and Caltrans rights-of-way. The trail will be fully wheelchair accessible and will feature a stormwater pollution remediating bioswale, native plant restoration, and a rain water collection cistern to provide summer irrigation water.

The proposed Conservancy grant will allow the completion of environmental documents required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Once CEQA review is completed, the City will seek funding for final design, permitting and construction phases. The City has been successful to date in securing grant funds for other segments of the CCVT, most recently receiving a Recreational Trails Program grant from the California Department of Parks and Recreation (Federal Highway Administration funds). The Santa Barbara County Association of Governments (SBCAG), the regional metropolitan planning organization has indicated that the project is a strong candidate for future funding. The project will coordinate with Caltrans widening projects planned for adjacent sections of Highway 101 in both Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties. The Rincon segment will compliment the freeway widening projects, because it addresses a gap in the bikeway not addressed in the widening projects themselves. The trail will likely benefit from related opportunities and implementation efficiencies associated with these Highway 101 projects.

Site Description: The project is located on lands within the jurisdiction of the City of Carpinteria and the County of Santa Barbara. Carpinteria is a quaint seaside village located about 12 miles east of Santa Barbara near the intersection of Highway 150 and U.S. 101 and near the Ventura County line. Carpinteria and its surrounding area contain important natural resources, including outstanding beaches, the Carpinteria Marsh Preserve, Carpinteria Reef, a Pacific harbor seal sanctuary, and coastal bluff, foothill and creek habitats supporting numerous plant communities and wildlife species.

Carpinteria offers outstanding opportunities for coastal recreation. Downtown shops and restaurants draw visitors, as well as opportunities for surfing, fishing, bird watching, wildlife viewing, and walking on nearby beaches. A number of special events take place in Carpinteria each year, including the Carpinteria Triathlon, the California Avocado Festival, and the Rincon Surf Competition. Carpinteria is a town of 14,000 people, with close to two million visitors a year due to the popularity of the area's beaches, parks and campground.

The Carpinteria bluffs provide visitors with a unique overlook along one of the last remaining undeveloped coastal bluffs of the South Coast of Santa Barbara County. Commonly seen from the bluffs are osprey, red-tailed hawks, American kestrels, turkey vultures, coastal bottlenose dolphins, California sea lions, Pacific harbor seals, California brown pelicans, western gulls and migrating gray whales.

Project History: Capitalizing on the important environmental resources and recreational opportunities in the Carpinteria area, the City and its residents have rallied around open space preservation and trail efforts, resulting in the purchase of the Carpinteria Salt Marsh Nature Park and Carpinteria Bluffs Nature Preserve properties and the enhancement of ecological and recreational areas.

The City of Carpinteria Parks and Recreation Department's recent history of park and trail development dates back to 1985. The City currently manages over 100 acres of parks, playgrounds, and open space areas. In January 2010, the Carpinteria City Council approved the 2010 Parks Department Work Plan, which includes plans to complete the Rincon segment of the

CCVT. To date, two miles of the CCVT have been constructed, with approximately three miles expected to be completed by 2014.

The Rincon Trail Study, completed by the City in 2009, evaluated a preferred trail route and developed preliminary designs for the Rincon segment of the CCVT. The Rincon Trail Study was funded by a grant from the County of Santa Barbara's County Resource Enhancement Fund (CREF).

The City is in the process of completing an Open Space Management Plan (OSMP) for the City-owned Carpinteria Bluffs Nature Preserve and Tar Pits properties. The OSMP includes a public access element and lays out the City's vision for completion of the larger CCVT. In the meantime, the City has pursued completion of other segments of the CCVT, all of which have undergone extensive public hearings to receive Coastal Development Permits.

In 2009, the City completed a Coastal Access Feasibility Study to analyze the feasibility of new sanctioned access points to connect Carpinteria's beaches and coastal resources with the rest of the community, determine potential railroad crossing alternatives, refine and prioritize alternatives based on public input, and create an implementation plan. The study was needed because of the "barrier effect" of the rail corridor on the city, the increased public use of the coast, the level of current and predicted passenger and freight train traffic with increased potential risk of conflict and uncontrolled crossings, the limited number of sanctioned crossings, and the hazardous practice of trespassing over railroad tracks to reach coastal destinations. The study has resulted in a number of specific recommendations and preliminary designs for crossings, including the crossing in the Rincon segment.

The Rincon segment of the CCVT will connect with the Carpinteria Bluffs Nature Preserve portion of the trail constructed in 2004. This segment was constructed as a condition of the Coastal Development Permit for the Preserve allowing development of a parking area, baseball fields and bathroom. The Carpinteria Bluffs Nature Preserve trail segment was planned and built to connect to the proposed Rincon segment and bridge across UPRR to create a contiguous trail.

PROJECT FINANCING:

This authorization

Coastal Conservancy	\$50,000
City of Carpinteria (in-kind)	<u>\$10,000</u>
Total Costs This Authorization:	\$60,000

Previously authorized planning costs

County CREF	\$50,000
City of Carpinteria (in-kind)	<u>\$10,000</u>
Total Project Costs:	\$120,000

The expected source for the Conservancy funds for this authorization is an appropriation to the Conservancy from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84). Proposition 84 authorizes the use of these

funds for the purpose of promoting access to and enjoyment of the coastal resources of the state (Section 75060 of the Public Resources Code). Section 75060(b) of the Public Resources Code specifically allocates funding to the Conservancy for expenditure pursuant to the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. The proposed project serves to promote access to coastal resources and, as discussed in the section found immediately below, the project is consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This project would be undertaken consistent with Division 21, Chapter 9 (public access) of the Conservancy's enabling legislation (California Public Resources Code Sections 31400-31410).

Section 31400 states that the Conservancy will "have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline."

In order to carry out that mandate, the Conservancy is authorized by section 31400.1 to provide grants to public entities to develop, operate and manage lands for access to and along the coast. Section 31400.1 restricts the Conservancy to providing grants to local agencies only for accessways that serve greater than local needs. Consistent with this section, the Coastal Trail through Carpinteria will serve both local residents and visitors from throughout the state.

Section 31400.2 authorizes the Conservancy to provide up to the total cost of the initial development of a public accessway by any public agency, and the amount of funding provided by the Conservancy shall be determined by the total amount of funding available for coastal public accessway projects, the fiscal resources of the applicant, the urgency of the project relative to other eligible projects, and the application of factors prescribed by the Conservancy. Consistent with this section, the proposed amount of the Conservancy contribution was determined based on the total amount of funding available to the Conservancy for public access projects, the matching funds provided by the grantee (see Project Financing), and the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria, including project urgency (See Consistency with Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria & Guidelines). The proposed authorization would leverage matching funds totaling 17% of the costs for this authorization and 58% of the total costs when planning costs are considered.

The proposed project is also consistent with Section 31400.3, under which the Conservancy is authorized to provide funds "required to aid public agencies and nonprofit organizations in establishing a system of public coastal accessways, and related functions necessary to meet the objectives of this division." These funds will be used for the environmental analysis of the proposed trail segment portion.

Finally, the proposed project is consistent with section 31408, which states that a) the Conservancy "shall, in consultation with the Department of Parks and Recreation, the California Coastal Commission, and the Department of Transportation, coordinate the development of the California Coastal Trail", and b) that "to the extent feasible, and consistent with their individual mandates, each agency, board, department, or commission of the state with property interests or regulatory authority in coastal areas shall cooperate with the Conservancy with respect to planning and making lands available for completion of the trail, including constructing trail

links, placing signs, and managing the trail.” The Conservancy will work closely with these agencies to coordinate the development of the trail in the Carpinteria area.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S 2007
STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective B** of the Conservancy’s Strategic Plan, as part of the proposed project, the City will install Coastal Trail signs along approximately three miles of existing Coastal Trail segments within the City of Carpinteria.

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective C**, the proposed project would complete plans for a one-mile link in the Carpinteria Coastal Vista Trail, part of the California Coastal Trail.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy’s Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on June 4, 2009, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

- 1. Promotion of the Conservancy’s statutory programs and purposes:** See the “Consistency with Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation” section above.
- 2. Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
- 3. Support of the public:** The project is supported by U.S. Congresswoman Lois Capps, State Assemblyman Pedro Nava, County Supervisor Salud Carbajal, and several local non-profit organizations including the Santa Barbara Bicycle Coalition, Carpinteria Valley Association, and the Citizens for the Carpinteria Bluffs (Exhibit 3: Project Letters).
- 4. Location:** The project is located within the coastal zone and falls under the jurisdiction of both the City of Carpinteria and County of Santa Barbara.
- 5. Need:** The City has obtained a County grant for about half of the funds needed for project planning and environmental review and is providing significant in-kind assistance. However, without additional funding, the City will not be able to complete this phase of the project.
- 6. Greater-than-local interest:** Visitors come to the south coast of Santa Barbara County from other regions to enjoy the mild climate, accessible beaches, and many recreational amenities this area has to offer. The Rincon segment will provide visitors with increased access to the coast and will connect the city of Carpinteria with Rincon County Park and points east and west along the Pacific Coast Bikeway.
- 7. Sea level rise vulnerability:** The Rincon’s segment’s vulnerability to sea level rise will be evaluated in the environmental analysis for the years 2050 and 2100. The segment will be designed to have a life of at least 20 years. The section of trail nearest the bluff face could be moved inland if the bluff were to fail as a result of sea level rise impacts.

Additional Criteria

- 8. Urgency:** The City is eager to resolve the safety issues that this project addresses. In addition, in order to take advantage of the possible funding opportunities or implementation efficiencies associated with the Caltrans widening project planned for adjacent sections of Highway 101 in both Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties, the project environmental review must move forward soon.
- 9. Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
- 10. Readiness:** The City is poised to move forward with the environmental review phase for this segment of the Coastal Trail.
- 11. Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** In 1998 the Conservancy provided a \$500,000 grant to the Land Trust of Santa Barbara County (LTSBC) to help acquire the Carpinteria Bluffs Nature Preserve. LTSBC later transferred this property to the City of Carpinteria. The Rincon trail segment will further the Conservancy’s previous goals for public access to and along the Carpinteria Bluffs Nature Preserve.
- 12. Minimization of Greenhouse Gas Emissions:** The project is designed to minimize use of materials in order to have less impact on the landscape and on natural resources. Local contractors and materials will be used whenever possible, minimizing vehicle miles traveled for the project, thereby minimizing greenhouse gas emissions. As part of the project, a cistern will be built to collect stormwater runoff and gravity fed to irrigate native tree and shrub plantings. Finally, the completed project will facilitate non-motorized forms of transportation, reducing reliance on motor vehicles to access the beach, also minimizing greenhouse gas emissions.

CONSISTENCY WITH THE CONSERVANCY’S STANDARDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACCESSWAY LOCATION AND DEVELOPMENT:

As a condition of approval, the project will be designed to be consistent with the Coastal Conservancy’s Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development. In particular:

- Standard No. 1. Protect the Public and Coastal Resources:** The proposed project will be designed to minimize alteration of natural landforms, will be subordinate to the setting’s character, will prevent unwarranted hazards to the land and public safety, and will protect environmentally sensitive habitats.
- Standard No. 2. Correct Hazards:** The proposed project will be designed to correct unsafe conditions such as those that exist in the current alignment of the Pacific Coast Bikeway along Highway 101.
- Standard No. 5. Environmentally Sensitive Areas:** The proposed project will be designed to ensure that adverse effects on natural resources are avoided. Specifically, most of the trail uses existing trail or road bed and abandoned railroad bed.
- Standard No. 8. Trails:** The accessway would connect an existing segment of the California Coastal Trail between Carpinteria Bluffs Nature Preserve, which includes several miles of

interconnected coastal bluff open space trails and Rincon County Park with one mile of blufftop trail.

Standard No. 9. Scenic Overlooks: The entire length of the trail will be designed to take advantage of the area's scenic views.

Standard No. 10. Coastal Bikeways: The proposed project will be designed as a Class I Bikeway for the exclusive use of bicycles and pedestrians.

Standard No. 12. Support Facilities: Designs for the project will consider the placement of support facilities such as overlooks, benches and trash receptacles, as appropriate.

Standard No. 13. Barrier-Free Access: The proposed project will be wheelchair accessible along its entire length.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The project will fall within the jurisdictions of both the City of Carpinteria and the County of Santa Barbara. Consistency with each local coastal program is discussed below.

The City of Carpinteria General Plan (adopted 1986)/Local Coastal Land Use Plan (adopted 1980) comprise the City's certified Local Coastal Program (LCP). The LCP contains several policies that support the proposed project. Land Use Policy LU-3h seeks to "develop land uses that encourage the thoughtful layout of transportation networks, minimize the impacts of vehicles in the community, and encourage alternative means of transportation." The Rincon Trail segment will reduce vehicle trips and encourage bicycle and pedestrian modes of transportation to access popular coastal destinations. The Open Space, Recreation and Conservation (OSC) Objective OSC-15 seeks to ... "provide additional recreation and access opportunities by expanding the trail system", and "pursue development of a trail and/or boardwalk system along the coastline." The Rincon segment will expand the Carpinteria Coastal Trail System, providing additional recreation and access opportunities along the Santa Barbara coastline. OSC-15 Implementation Policy 73 states that, "as a part of the development of the trail system, minimize the number of formal rail crossings for pedestrians and improve their safety through crossing controls or other improvements such as fencing and landscaping. Seek joint funding for such improvements from state and federal agencies and the railroad." The project will formalize one railroad crossing along this segment, providing for safe access to the coast. Circulation Objective C-8 seeks to "support and develop safe, direct and well-maintained bicycle and pedestrian systems ...that serve all segments of the public" and to "encourage ... a coastal link to Ventura paralleling U.S. 101." The project will provide a safe, direct and well-maintained coastal pedestrian and bike trail link to Ventura paralleling Highway 101.

The certified Santa Barbara County Coastal Land Use Plan (LCP), adopted in 1982, contains several general policies that support the proposed project. Goal 1.2(b) seeks to "assure orderly, balanced utilization and conservation of coastal zone resources taking into account the social and economic needs of the people and the state" and Goal 1.2(c) calls for local agencies to "maximize public access to and along the coast and maximize public recreational opportunities in the coastal zone consistent with sound resources conservation principles." The Rincon Trail will conserve coastal resources while meeting a community need for safe, non-motorized access between a popular bluff park, beach and nearby coastal attractions. Policy 3.7-6 states that recreational uses on oceanfront lands, both public and private, that do not require extensive

alteration to the natural environment...shall have priority over uses requiring substantial alteration” and Policy 3.7-8 calls for increased opportunities for beach access to be provided in the Carpinteria Valley Planning Area. The proposed trail will be located on an old terrace cut for the previous railroad route and will connect an existing vacant lot and parking lot, minimizing land disturbance in most areas. Furthermore, the trail route does not cross any drainage or riparian corridors, does not impact any wetlands, and will not affect any sensitive species, according to an initial biological assessment.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The project is statutorily exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15262, because it involves only feasibility or planning studies for possible future actions, which the Conservancy has not yet approved, adopted, or agreed to fund. As required by Section 15262, planning for this Rincon segment of the California Coastal Trail will include consideration of environmental factors.

Upon Conservancy approval of the project, staff will file a Notice of Exemption.